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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an academic vice president's critical discussion of student personnel services and career counseling. The author begins by examining the isolation of student services from faculty, staff and administrators. He than looks at the emphasis made on placement without adequate student preparation for career planning and career choice. These and other criticisms culminate in a call to student service workers to utilize the mechanisms and authority at their command to promote career counseling, academic counseling, and responsible and responsive placement services. The author also calls for greater intrainstitutional communication and cooperation. (SJL)

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An Academic Vice President Looks at Student Services/Career Services - A Muddle

Charles E. P. Simmons

Some have suggested that I approach this particular meeting with fear and trepidation, I do not. Higher education is far too dull and stagnant for me to approach any meeting, other than faculty meetings, with any insecurities. I am not trained in your sundry fields, but having been an administrator for ten years, taught for nearly twenty, and from the vantage point of looking back on some of the problems and idiocyncracies that can be noted, perhaps I can offer some positive ideas for your profession to consider in the future, which will benefit not only yourselves, but higher education as well. Let me hasten to add that having been called by one of your leading professionals, authoritarian, rigid, undemocratic, unbending and difficult makes me probably suspect, but I agree with all of what he said, which will give you a splendid base from which to throw arrows to add to those which have come in my direction over these many years.

Let me begin by saying that I believe in student services, which puts me on the side of the angels and makes you quite comfortable. At the same time, I do not accept what is being done presently in our universities and colleges under that rubric. The question is, "Why

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not?" When I was a young faculty member, I sent people out to the guidance center stating that a young person had a problem in study habits, or perhaps I had noted a personal difficulty and could the center help them. I never saw the individual again. Of course that didn't occur to me until three or four years after I sent somebody out to those centers that they never came back. What happened to them? One could begin to have pictures of them being taken and made into little green wafers. I never received a report on them. When I asked as I did in later years, "Well, what about John?" The answer came, "We can't discuss this, this is a privileged matter. You realize the confidentiality of the whole problem and, of course, you have no training in our field." Finally, I did not send students out to the guidance center, but began to chat with students in areas that I felt comfortable with, about their problems.

Then, of course as the years moved along, there has been my same feeling of deja vu with the placement center. Send a student over to that center, placement, and ask, what about careers for them? "We don't talk about careers, we just place them." "What do you mean you just place them?" "Well, we bring the people in." "Oh, you mean you bring business types in from the outside to tell the students what to do?" "Yes, that's all we do." "Do you fill out

resumes?" "We help fill out resumes and help them with their letters." "Anything I can do?" "No, we'll take care of it. You're not trained in our field." And so the placement center should be aware that career counseling is and was an isolated entity with individuals whose career embodies the "Peter Principal," lacking in dynamics or drive. And of course you could say, "well, send students to the vice president for student personnel." This very concept is an acronymism, an archaic position which should be done away with as rapidly as possible. Send somebody there and what happens - you never hear from them either.

So what we have developed in the area of student services is a concept of fortress guidance, fortress placement, fortress counseling, isolated entities on the campus which are the factions of power. There is added to their fortress mentality a fearfulness on the part of the student service people to ask academicians about their needs. Student services don't help the academician and the academician in turn doesn't try to help them. Never in ten years has there been a meshing of the academic/student services, particularly if there is a vice president of student services. Let me point out, however, on the other side of the coin, faculties are oblivious of the developments in career counseling and student services and have a fortress mentality, stating as they have for the last ten years, that they know all about advising. This is not the same as counseling. Their supervising is at best

simplicistic; at worst it's a fraud, but the twain are not meeting. Therefore, from an academic vice president's point of view, where is the excitement and where are the changes that need to come about? They will regretfully not come from the faculty. Faculties will not change and their mentality, which is a narrow, specialistic one, has been castrated by the American graduate school system which will go on indefinitely. It is doubtful that in my next twenty-two years will there be any substantive change because most of the graduate deans of this country are too comfortable, stagnant and, frankly, lazy to make any substantive changes in approach. Most undergraduate and undergraduate teachers in universities and colleges say today that if advising was good enough for us, it's good enough for them. I don't approve of this particular thesis.

Therefore, I must turn to you of APGA student services and say it is with you, with all the mechanisms and authority at your command that you begin to take a lead in career counseling, academic counseling, in placement; and as a programatic curricular concept, it should become a keystone in our respective universities and colleges. It should become something which is inbred in students from the very first time they approach an institution, at the time when they are recruited, that they have an understanding that they are being recruited not just for the athletic program or just for the academic program, but we are

recruiting them to get ready for a lifelong experience in education. It should be laid out for them at the beginning of their courses that career counseling is a part of the university experience and placement begins at the beginning. From the start, students should be told what the national trends will be, what positions are being phased out, and what some of the new occupations are. By using such newer concepts for the guidance and personnel people as CVIS and Discoverie which receive national updates from the statisticians and can be utilized, guidance people can be freed for additional, more personalized attention to the individual. The freshman should be exposed to career counseling, and it should be done with an increasing emphasis in the four years. The president at a major university said, "What you're talking about is what I've done all along in political science." My response is, "No, it's not! What you did is discuss what they could do with a political science major, not what they could do with an English major or social science major." I'm asking what they can do in careers. Career guidance must be explained to all, and it is the student service and academic responsibility to do so. Students should not, all of a sudden, walk into a placement office and be asked to write a resume. Most students do not know how to write, but to write a resume is almost impossible. Noting some Ph.D. resumes crossing my desk, particularly these latter months, I note that they, the Ph.D.'s, know

nothing about resume writing either. In fact, I hesitate to claim that they know anything about a verb. So it comes down that career education and student services must be inbred into institutional life. It cannot be a fortress concept. There must be a meshing.

Now I have been rather critical of the student personnel vice president, and I remain critical. In most of the institutions where I have been, he is an individual who is unimaginative, uncreative and definitely not forceful. His main concept and idea is to keep "his" fortresses alive. Sometimes he has admissions reporting to him, and usually the personnel and guidance people report to him. Mainly it's a he. The student vice president is less than current with what's going on in higher education today with all of its ramifications. And speaking from the experience of five institutions, none of them had flexibility or creativity to be a force for change. They are overpaid, underworked and allow others to do their job. But what is even sadder to note is that they still have an understanding somehow that the 18 to 22 year old market is viable. They still believe in the "kids" coming in - the golden age where they could be pater familias! The concept of lifelong learning whereby we are going to help people beyond the 22 year old level to come back to gain their degrees at the age of 30, 40, 50 and on creates problems for the student services that they have never had before and are totally unequipped to deal. In my institution,

the constant complaint of the older person coming back is: "Why on earth do I have to pay a fee to the student services? Why on earth do we have to have them, they do not understand what we're here for. They do not understand why we have to have degrees for promotional advancement at the bank." In short, student services simply do not understand the older students because they are a threat to them. Of all the areas that the vice president for student personnel can be criticized for it is this one. He appears to be interested only in the limited market, and is unaware the consumer has changed. We must have the concept of career counseling and student services in its broadest aspect becoming the heart and soul of an institution. Moreover, I believe that the area of student services, as it is traditionally known, should be under an area or discipline that a forceful leader could begin to take the whole center and make it a living resource in the center/hub of a campus. Not off in some hidden house, not off on the side where you have to walk down the street, but to really be visible, a place that students of any age can drop in to see what is going on; and that above all, a humanistic concept is not only taught, but practiced in the institution. Until we begin to move student services into the main stream of campus life, "career counseling as a crusade" is not going to be successful.

For the faculty side, there must be faculty development seminars

with the professionals from these career areas of guidance and counseling, so that the faculty members who are keen on it can begin to develop newer concepts for advising students. Break down the idea of clutching all the information to our bosoms and talk about what we can do for the student to make his/her life a little bit more rewarding on the campus, not for the immediate, but for the long range. The consumer, the student, is something we must concern ourselves with and students today are not going to accept isolationism. They are more aware and the guidance and counseling center is at most places the least effective, least visible and least forceful in getting its ideas across. Again, begin to have the idea of student services permeate so that the individuals can come back on campus and talk about the problems they have after they leave. It is tragic to see students leave these last few years and discover that they are simply will-o-the-wisp. They know nothing about what they can do with the education we have so loftily offered them, and the triumphalism of American education falters when it comes to career education.

Indeed I am saying and asking for the responsibility for the whole person. I disagree with the Carnegie Commission report on higher education that states that we cannot assume the full developmental responsibility for students, nor can we or should we take direct responsibility and that our primary responsibility as an educational

institution, to assist only the intellectual and skilled development. This is a truncated concept. We must go further, we must take what Alexander Heard says, "A concern for the personal development results from the need to be able to cope with the conditions of technological society that led to the decline of authority in other institutions, and involve with the development of standards of value, a sense of civic responsibility, the capacity for religious reconciliations, skills, understanding and a sense of purpose and all the rest required to be well informed and a well integrated individual." The institution that can help its students become an integrated person, with a sense of command over his own destiny and a sense of how he fits into his complicated physical/social involvement, will achieve the most demanding and significant educational objective of our time. It is my contention that we are failing and our institutions are not accepting that challenge that the students have a sense of command over their destiny and the one area that most assuredly has not accepted it is the area of student services and counseling.